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After successfully completing the pole-weaving pattern, a smiling Grace Anderson directs Molly to the next pattern.

Hills' Rock Ranch Offers Rare Horsemanship Class Through Luverne Community Education

Wed, 05/17/2017 - 11:04am jkor

May 31 is the sign-up deadline for 'Introduction to Horsemanship'

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BY: MAVIS FODNESS

Announcer

The adage, "There's something about the outside of a horse that is good for the inside of a man," was evident last week during one of Marie LaRock's horsemanship sessions.

Ten-year-old Grace Anderson from Beaver Creek was all smiles as she rode Molly, a placid quarter horse mare, through a series of obstacles.

"She just loves horses," said her mother, Katie, as she watched from just outside the fence. "I am asked every day if she can get a horse."

As a compromise, Grace gets a full horse experience from LaRock who recently opened Rock Ranch near Hills.

LaRock, a speech and language pathologist and horse enthusiast, is opening her acreage and horses to elementary through high school students for an "Introduction to Horsemanship" class offered through Luverne Community Education.

Participants can choose one of three Tuesdays: June 6, 13 or 20.

For an hour, students receive hands-on experience about how horses think and behave, and they learn about equipment such as that needed for grooming.

Each activity is done in the safest manner possible, LaRock said.

Luverne Community Education director Karen Willers said LaRock's class is the first equine offering since she took over the program in 1999.

"It's the first time ever," Willers wrote in an email. "Marie and Dan LaRock called us and asked if we would consider working together on a venture like this — which is the best way for community education activities to develop."

More often, Willers said her committee would have an idea or suggestion for a class and the hunt for an instructor would ensue.

Rock Ranch is already a 501c(3) non-profit organization. They already have liability insurance in place and have the necessary liability waiver and health information paperwork in place for participants, Willers said.

The forms are available on the ranch's website at www.riderockranch.org.

Offering the public an outlet to interact with horses is just getting off the ground for the LaRocks.

They had previously offered friends and fellow church members the opportunity to learn more about horses and to ride. For some participants, the visits were their first experience with horses.

Horses can improve a person in four key areas: physically, cognitively, socially and psychologically.

LaRock has seen firsthand how riding and working with a horse can help specific problems through her involvement with HorsePower, a therapeutic and hippotherapy program near Sioux Falls.

Providing education and recreation with horses locally is also a first for LaRock.

"I thought it would be a good place to start introducing the public to Rock Ranch," she said.

Ironically her own experience with horses began at the same rural Hills acreage where she lives with her family and where the lessons take place.

"My grandfather was a huge horseman," LaRock said about her mother's father, Harold Sather.

"He helped me get my first pony."

LaRock is the daughter of Marilyn Nelson, Hills, and the late Duane Nelson.

The Hills-Beaver Creek High School graduate said she has fond memories of traveling the few short miles regularly to her grandparents' home — now her own acreage — to care for her pony and to ride.

LaRock wants those who come to the ranch to leave with the same memories.

Luverne ANNOUNCER



Crop Insurance Meetings

Tuesday, February 5
10 am • Meet to follow
Grand Prairie Events • 1st Day St. Louis

Tuesday, February 5
6:30 pm Meet • Meeting to follow
Grand Prairie Events • 1st Day St. Louis

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6:30 pm • Meet to follow
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"It's just a great experience and we have the facilities," she said.

Safety is the No. 1 emphasis at the LaRock Ranch when working with the animals.

The safety starts with the participants themselves: they need to wear boots or closed-toed shoes.

"Safety is huge," LaRock said. "Lots of things can happen."

Three experienced horses are used for the various lessons.

Depending on students' ages, a Shetland pony named Spirit provides a shorter option for children. Two full-sized horses named Molly and Flo provide steady mounts for riding.

For Hills-Beaver Creek fifth-grader Grace Anderson, last week's ride on Molly was a significant event.

"That was the first time I rode a horse that wasn't a miniature or a pony," she said.

LaRock used a series of games on horseback that helped Anderson learn how to turn while encouraging a slow-going Molly through the various obstacles.

After the one-hour introductory community education class, students can take LaRock's more advanced classes, which include riding lessons like those taken by Anderson.

May 31 is the deadline to sign up for LaRock's "Introduction to Horsemanship" class through Luverne Community Education. The cost is \$15.

A minimum of three participants is necessary for one of six class times to be offered. Maximum is five students.

The Rock Ranch is located one mile west of Hills on County Road 13 and a half mile north on 40th Avenue.

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HORSE

INTRODUCTION TO HORSEMANSHIP

COMMUNITY EDUCATION



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